

Critique

Studies of multi-ethnic literature of the U.S., proposed in “From the Ground Up . . .” should be, if they are not already, accepted fields of study in colleges, universities and secondary schools. One would hope that by now, the unique perspective offered by multi-ethnic studies would be appreciated for the insight it offers in understanding the many elements which have created our heritage, history and contemporary “American Society”—and, by extension, global society as well. One would expect that multi-ethnic studies are, or will soon be requisite in “standard” humanities curricula for the same reasons that courses such as geography, world history and literature and studies of European and American history and literature are required.

Contemplating the achievements of the civil rights movements and minority group activities during the past two decades, one would not only hope, but *expect* studies of multi-ethnicity to have attained recognized status by now. As Bedrosian indicates, however, these studies, sadly, are still considered so special as to require elaborate apology and justification for their existence. The arguments offered in support of studying multi-ethnicity, however, should be applied, to *all* literary studies, as measures of validity for including them in “standard” curricula.

The author proposes a multi-faceted approach and the examination of specific works from both individual and world views. Bedrosian’s quest for personal identity and psychological/psychic vision (or “self-realization”) emerges clearly as the primary focus of study. The implications of this method are alarming. Are literature classes to become clinics in psychoanalysis in which vicarious crusades are mounted in search of a multi-cultural holy grail? Will professors of literature and multi-ethnicity be obliged to become, also, culturally peripatetic analysts? Leaving aside questions of pedagogical validity, this narcissistic focus must, inevitably, render us insensitive to the new visions and comprehension posited as rewards for the journey into self.

Certainly, our perceptions of the world are filtered through the screens of our personal experiences and attitudes. Indisputably, knowledge and understanding of ourselves is necessary in order to know and understand the world about us. Indisputably also, we measure our own perceptions, opinions, and attitudes by comparing them to challenging and conflicting notions. But how can we understand or even acknowledge variation or diversity of any sort when our attention is immutably fixed upon our own mirrored image?

Alarming too is the interpretation forced upon the literature under review, as a consequence of this approach. If literature describing multi-ethnic experiences and reflecting multi-cultural world views is not approached with an open, inquiring mind, but rather in relentless pursuit of testaments of self-realization, how are we to understand or

even recognize visions offered of the world outside the self? In this context, writings such as Ralph Ellison's are seen merely as springboards for flights of fancy. Ellison, however, in this anecdote describing the interpretation imposed upon the school children, neatly distinguishes the art of "teaching *how* to think" from the authoritarian tradition of "teaching *what* to think."

We might hope for other, richer rewards from multi-ethnic studies than Bedrosian offers. Ethnic diversity has been and is increasingly a definition of the world we live in, a description of contemporary reality. Our ability to survive in this world may depend on the success with which we learn to balance our personal identities and social relationships in a pan-cultural environment. The historical perspective to be gained in studies of the ethnic diversity that created our society is necessary not to "re-imagine America" but to help us understand and respond to the world we live in.

At very least, the exposure to values, mores, and customs of other cultures will make us more comfortable with diversity and less threatened by it.

In our acceptance we will learn not only to tolerate but also to actively cherish and nurture a "diversified culture," abandoning the "... self-images that breed pessimism and fear ...," and with them the blindfolds of negativism and intolerance with which we cripple ourselves and paralyze our society.

—Gloria Eive

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Bedrosian presents an interesting discussion on spiritual dismemberment and a series of subjects which are related to this concept. As a researcher in crosscultural communication, I find the article to be relevant, not only with multi-ethnic literature, but with human communication processes as well.

America recently celebrated her 211th birthday. In context with older societies, the American culture is very much a great experiment. Our diversity of cultural backgrounds provides strengths and weaknesses.

One of the weaknesses, in contrast with older cultures, is that we have limited distinction with our ethnic backgrounds. The lack of depth in this area is due to the degree of breadth, or diversity of ethnic backgrounds, which exists. Consequently, there are millions in our nation who cannot accurately trace their bloodlines more than a few generations. The situation is compounded as bloodlines in America frequently involve multi-ethnic backgrounds. Thus, many of us have a "diluted" bond with our primary ethnic background.

Many Americans have sought to learn more about their *roots and* ethnic heritage. In 1977, the movie "Roots" inspired the culture as a whole to examine its many backgrounds and trace these backgrounds to